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U.S. JURORS INDICT AN ISRAELI OFFICER ON SPYING COUNTS

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WASHINGTON, March 3 — A Federal grand jury here today indicted a prominent Israeli Air Force officer, Aviem Sella, on espionage charges, saying he had conspired with three other Israelis and Jonathan Jay Pollard to obtain top secret American military information for Israel.

The officer, described by Federal prosecutors as a brigadier general, would face a maximum sentence of life in prison and a \$500,000 fine if convicted of spying. United States Attorney Joseph E. diGenova said, however, that espionage as a "political offense" was exempted under extradition treaties and that therefore General Sella could not be extradited to stand trial in this country.

If he came to this country voluntarily, Mr. diGenova said, General Sella would be arrested and tried. The prosecutor added that while the general, who is 41 years old, could not easily be tried at this time, "the United States does not ignore the violation of its espionage laws when its national security has been severely damaged."

Mr. diGenova noted that the State Department had been involved in the decision to indict Mr. Sella and had fully supported it.

U.S.-Israeli Friction

The investigation surrounding the Pollard case has been a source of continuing friction between the United States and Israel. While some Justice Department officials have complained they were misled in their investigation by the Israelis, the Israelis and their supporters have been angered that American officials sought to prosecute the cases in well-publicized criminal proceedings rather than resolving them through quiet, diplomatic talks.

According to a State Department official, the indictment of General Sella represents the first time to his knowledge that an Israeli official has been indicted in the United States.

General Sella could not be reached for comment in Israel today, and his Washington lawyer, Nathan Lewin, declined to comment. According to Federal officials, Mr. Lewin proposed late Monday to have General Sella plead no contest to a misdemeanor to avoid indictment, but the Justice Department rejected the offer.

No Immediate Israeli Reaction

Federal officials also said the Justice Department was seeking to revoke the immunity it initially granted to the three other Israelis described in the indictment as part of the spy ring with Mr. Pollard, a former Navy counterterrorism analyst.

In Israel, spokesmen for the Prime Minister, Foreign Minister and Defense Minister were not available to receive phone calls.

The Associated Press reported that Israeli Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin, on a tour of the Occupied West Bank, refused today to comment on the Sella indictment, but said claims by Mr. Pollard that his spying was authorized by high-ranking officials were "total nonsense."

A Justice Department spokesman said the three Israelis had engaged in a "massive deception and cover-up" and added that if the department succeeded in revoking their immunity, "we would seek their indictment on espionage charges."

The indictment identifies one of the three other conspirators as Rafael Eitan, a former chief of operations of the Mossad, Israel's foreign intelligence service, who was also a former adviser on terrorism to Prime Ministers Menachem Begin and Yitzhak Shamir. In 1981, Mr. Eitan was named head of the Bureau of Scientific Affairs, a small intelligence unit charged with

gathering scientific information.

The others named as conspirators and facing potential indictment, according to Federal officials, were Yosef Yagur, the former science attaché at the Israeli Consulate in New York, and Irit Erb, a former secretary at the Israeli Embassy in Washington.

While Israel has repeatedly described the Pollard spy ring as a "renegade" operation that was not sanctioned by its government, American and Israeli officials have said it was inconceivable that Mr. Eitan could have engaged in an unauthorized operation.

Mr. Pollard, 32 years old, who pleaded guilty to espionage and has been cooperating with Federal prosecutors, and his wife, Anne Henderson-Pollard, 26, who pleaded guilty to lesser charges, face sentencing Wednesday in Federal District Court here. In addition to fines, Mr. Pollard faces a possible maximum of life in prison and his wife a potential maximum of 10 years in prison.